DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 483 CG 030 929

AUTHOR Smith, Sally A.
TITLE "What We Are and What We're Not": Early Adolescent Girls Negotiate Their Identities through Talk about Text.
PUB DATE 2001-04-00
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Dating (Social); *Females; *Grade 6; *Identification (Psychology); *Literature; Middle School Students; Middle Schools; Peer Relationship; *Self Concept; *Sexual Identity
IDENTIFIERS Book Clubs; Romance; *Vicarious Participation

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how a group of sixth grade girls thought about their own agency at a transitional period in their lives, when reading books with strong, independent, realistic female characters. The girls vicariously explored agency as they compared their lives and possibilities with those of novel characteristics. Each of the four novels read provided exploration of their own possibilities, identification with the main character, and explorations of the elements of romance and attraction. The data gathered from conversations with the girls suggest that as adolescent girls struggle to negotiate their identities in the world, their environments need to be structured to provide them with experiences and opportunities that enable them to understand, engage, and potentially transform what limits and harms them. The discussion group provided one possible context for engagement and understanding. The selection of novels with female protagonists allowed these readers to actively position themselves as readers who could explore their questions and emotions to identify with the heroine. Data from the sixth grade girls' after school book club add to a body of research that strongly suggests the importance of providing literature transactions for early adolescent girls that will engage their complex reading purposes. (Contains 34 references.) (JDM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 452 483

Do not quote or reproduce without permission.

"What We Are and What We're Not:" Early Adolescent Girls Negotiate Their Identities Through Talk About Text

Sally A. Smith
Department of Curriculum & Teaching
243 Gallon Wing, Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY 11549
catsas@hofstra.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S Smith
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CG030929

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Do not quote or reproduce without permission. Inquiries: Sally Smith, 243 Gallon Wing, 113 Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY, 11549; catsas@hofstra.edu

"What We Are and What We're Not:" Early Adolescent Girls Negotiate Their Identities Through Talk About Realistic Fiction

Nereida: I think a lot of authors portray girls rather evil, or like so superficial.

Suzette: Talking about boys...

Mary: Doing their nails...

Nereida: [said in falsetto] What color are your nails now?

Suzette: It's like, "He's so cute!" That's not, you know, there's so much more.

Nereida: We're not so shallow...

This early conversation in a literature discussion group introduced me, facilitating as a participant researcher, to the complex and ambivalent responses of a group of early adolescent girls. Their responses, assured or exploratory, combative or collaborative, illuminated their understandings of portrayals of females in literature, and their own ideas about themselves as ten, eleven and twelve year-olds. My initial purpose as a researcher was to investigate how a group of sixth grade girls thought about their own agency at a transitional period in their lives, when reading books with strong, independent, realistic female characters, not evil or shallow portrayals.

During this study the girls vicariously explored agency as they compared their lives and possibilities with those of novel characters; however, they also had other reading purposes, which were fascinating and unexpected. In selecting possible books for the club I deliberately avoided romance novels. Yet these girls used their reading to explore their interest in romance and desire, and their discourse to examine and share this interest. They also used reading as a combative strategy: one that vicariously enabled them to be bad girls, more knowledgeable than adults would think. Their discourse revealed that while exploring their needs to be desired and desiring, they did not want to be limited to female gender stereotypes.

The girls used their sense of agency in two ways: to help combat female

stereotypes of passivity and the image of good girls, on the one hand, and as an active exploration of the aspects of sexuality and romance hinted at in the first novel read, The Beggar's Ride (Nelson, 1992), and in two other novels. This use, made visible through the conversations in book club, illustrated the complexity of their identification with the novels' characters and the contradictory and fluid negotiation of their own identities and female roles. While relishing the reading and talk about desire and attraction, they frequently noted with delight that Clare, from The Beggar's Ride , and other female protagonists, took initiative and were "brave, strong, and fiercely independent."

This ethnographic study of a racially and culturally diverse group of middle class sixth grade girls in an after school book club presented an opportunity to explore questions of reading purposes, and to speculate how engagement with one genre of text might affect female identity development.

Resistance, Resilience, and Silence in Female Adolescence

Early adolescence presents a critical juncture in girls' lives. As they leave the elementary school for the departmentalized structures and curriculum of the middle school, they come to a critical crossroads of social and cognitive development. For all adolescents, there is an increase in expectations for social experience outside the home, and an intensification of differential gender roles (Brown, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Finders, 1996; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). These occurrences position early adolescents at a pivotal juncture, and this is especially true of girls.

Listening to girls from independent schools not so very different from the school that the participants in book club attended, researchers (Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1992) observed two types of resistance to societal expectations and limitations. In girls from eight to twelve, they observed a resistance they termed "political," knowing what one knows and speaking it. While these studies indicate that girls' aggression becomes gradually more indirect through childhood, researchers have found a rise in direct aggression around age eleven, as girls begin to contemplate the more proscribed gender roles and expectations of

adolescence. This seems to be true of both white and black girls (Brown, 1998; Debold, et al., 1999).

Researchers found that as girls entered adolescence, they exhibited a resistance that was more psychological (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990). This psychological resistance was described as a reluctance to acknowledge what they know and to speak of it. These older girls, twelve, thirteen and fourteen years old, were often seen as balancing between how school and society envisioned their roles, and their own understanding and needs. What was once a sign of girls' resiliency, their capacity to feel anger, to be sure of their feelings and knowledge, had become a liability, especially within white, middle class contexts.

While black girls have been documented as resistant throughout adolescence, and more likely to speak out (American Association of University Women, 1991; Ward, 1990, 1996), studies also show that academically successful girls of color, in any school setting, may eventually lose their voices (Fordham, 1993). For black girls and other girls of color in a primarily white setting such as in independent or suburban school, the experience of being both a minority and a female can be doubly silencing and complicated (Proweller, 1999).

The ten, eleven and twelve year-old girls in the book club that is the focus of my study represented the transition between these two stages, often talking about feeling silenced in the classroom, but for the most part loud and sure in the book club setting. Their knowledge about school and societal expectations was voiced surely and boldly as they talked about the novels. They used the worlds of the texts to question and explore their present lives and visions of the future. Speaking from her position as a middle class female, Suzette articulated her own understanding of the transition from childhood to adolescence in an interview:

> It's like, now we're trying to define our feelings better. Cause we haven't *lived* that much yet. We're still -- boys and girls are still kind of equal. Cause we're all the same age, and we're all kind of awkward. And you know, we're kind of sheltered. But once

everyone gets into high school, you really start to see the sexual boundaries. And that's when you get to see what you are and what you're not.

Negotiations of Identity in the Social Context of a Literature Response Group

Reading discussion groups can be productive venues in which to research girls' development. As readers talk together about their personally lived through transactions with literature (Rosenblatt, 1978), tacit beliefs and emerging understandings about their own situated identities are often revealed. In intimate, meetings that take place over a period of time, these beliefs and understandings are continually being negotiated in the context of peer-group discourse. The engagement with a text within the social context of a literature response group facilitates the on-going, ever-changing process of identity construction. The After School Book Club

The sixth- grade girls who participated in book club had responded to an invitation by this researcher, an outsider to the school, to participate in a new after school offering for girls. This offering was described to the sixth grade homerooms and in a notice sent home to parents. The girls attended an independent school in a large urban area in the Northeast which served primarily white, professional families. All six girls who formed the initial book club shared middle to upper middle-class backgrounds, but were ethnically and racially diverse. While the girls clearly identified themselves as white, black or African American, and to a lesser extent, as Latina, the circumstances of class sometimes softened racial and cultural differences, particularly for the Latina and interracial girls, often causing class cohesiveness to predominate. For these girls, the context of the independent school, where they were not differentiated or treated as culturally different from their peers enabled them -most of the time - to experience the world as color and culture-blind. Like the affluent suburban females studied by Twine (1997), they inhabited the same world as their European-American peers.

Table 1 provides data on the eight girls who participated in book club. Suzette,

Luann, Nereida and Peggy were at the first session when I proffered ten young adult novels as possible reading choices. These girls looked over the paperback books, and after a discussion of reading tastes, selected The Beggar's Ride as the first reading choice. Two other novels were identified as possibilities for later. A novel by a visiting author became the fourth novel choice. These novels are briefly described in Table 2.

In the second week of book club, Regina and Mary joined. These six girls formed the book club for the first six sessions, while we read and responded to The Beggar's Ride, the focus of this paper.

Five of the six girls said they had joined the group because they liked to read books and in Nereida's words, " ... don't have anyone to talk to about them." Peggy admitted that she had come only because her friends talked her into it. Interviews with the girls' language arts teachers at the semester's end, and the inclusion of five of the six girls on the middle school high honor or honor roll revealed that these sixth graders were good students, considered responsible and well-behaved. They were good girls, the kind of student faculty expected would join a literature discussion group.

The girls and I met once a week for an hour in an empty classroom. Individual interviews with each girl took place at four intervals during and after the study. Table 3 shows the time line and scope of the data collection. Each segment of the data was analyzed using a constant comparison method in which new data was compared to previously collected data; data was analyzed through recursive readings, codes were identified, and these data clusters were recoded and themes identified (Ely, et al., 1991). Tapes and/or transcripts were shared with the girls in subsequent sessions to revisit topics, to share data with my participants, and to triangulate my preliminary themes and categories.

Engagement in the World of the Novel

Each of the four novels read in book club provided opportunities for exploration of their own possibilities, but The Beggar's Ride revealed the strongest

identification with the main character and explorations of the elements of romance and attraction. The novel contained compelling and attractive characters which fully engaged the six sixth graders reading the text. The novel tells the story of twelve year-old Clare, who flees an abusive situation at home and is befriended by a gang of homeless teens in Atlantic City. Like the three other books subsequently read in book club, can be categorized as "social issues realism" (Lukens, 1995, p. 13). It dealt with serious life issues such as homelessness and alienation, and had a resourceful female character. This character, Clare, is working class and white, and although Nelson does not refer explicitly to race, descriptions of other characters indicate that they were intended to be racially diverse. Principle characters include Cowboy, who befriends Clare, and Thimble, the only other female gang member.

The fast-paced plot, the vivid, evocative language and carefully realized scenes in The Beggar's Ride appealed to the readers. The scenes were layered to reveal both the troubling pathos of the lives of different gang members and the humor in their attempts to live the lives of normal teenagers. Clare is gradually revealed as a plucky, loyal, brave and vulnerable girl. Cowboy remains shadowy, yet a strong and protective person. Thimble is portrayed as hostile and deeply troubled, but loyal to members of the gang.

The novel is a carefully crafted adventure story with colorful characters, and the suggestion of a romantic relationship. While homelessness and the vulnerability of these teens - particularly Clare and Thimble - is portrayed in a realistic (if upbeat) manner, racial and class issues are not addressed. In later book club sessions, with a group that now included two black members, reading texts with black protagonists, race, in addition to gender roles, became an important focus of the group's discussion.

Identifying With a Real Girl, Like Themselves

That the participants of book club found Clare an appealing and identifiable character through whom they could explore their own feelings of "becoming" and possibility was shown in data from their exploratory conversations in which they

sorted out and reexperienced (Barnes, 1993) aspects of the novel in their verbal response, and from letters written to their favorite character in the eleventh session, after we had read three novels. These letters, from Mary, Peggy, Suzette, Nereida and Regina indicate that they all found ways of identifying with Clare, finding her a "regular girl" like themselves, an interesting combination of the naive and brave.

Suzette's letter introduced herself, comparing herself to Clare:"I think I ought to tell you about myself. I guess I'm about your age, a little younger, and a whole lot more innocent." She added that Clare's story opened her eyes

> to a new world that I haven't experienced and hope I never do. All the tragedies you have gone through taught me about life's darker side... I feel like I've experienced all of the roller coaster rides of your life. There were some things I might have done differently.... But then again, it's your story and your life.

Suzette's clear visualization of the character, her vicarious, lived-through experience of "life's darke · side," and her recognition that this girl was one she could hold herself against to judge herself, serve to illustrate how her own engagement with this text satisfied her reading purposes.

In conversations in the four sessions that focused on The Beggar's Ride, the girls re-experiencing the reading through retellings and explorations of the characters. The girls reminded one another of what had gone on in the novel, their comments weaving in and out of one another's, building up a shared understanding of what these events or actions meant and comparing them to their own lives and experiences. Clare's life enabled them to think about their own strengths, vulnerabilities, and possibilities. The girls relish a favorite scene of Clare taking a sink bath in a public rest room. Her awkwardness and vulnerability remind them of their feelings as early adolescents with changing, surprising bodies, and as they re-experience the situation they compare themselves with Clare:

Romance, Desire

Despite the denial of interest in typical romance novels, the girls in the

group were interested in if and how a relationship involving a non-girly character, a regular girl like themselves, might develop. As they began to read and talk about the novel The Beggar's Ride , Suzette predicted that a relationship would materialize between the main characters, Cowboy and Clare, and Mary said, "I think there's a little crush!"

While admiring tough, brave, regular girls like Clare, the book club members were also drawn in by the promise of romance. The text allowed the girls to ponder their desires to be living more exciting lives, to consider the fascination of romance and sexuality. The characters were appealing to the readers because of the several levels of meaning in their portrayals, levels of meaning that corresponded to their own development. Clare was spunky and tough, but also desirable to and desiring of the opposite sex ; Cowboy was both the "father" of the gang and an attractive and attracted male. They visualized their favorite scenes with Cowboy, wondering what he looked like, exactly, and how old he was. Was he black or white, was his hair curly or straight?

As they continued to read, several conversations explored the triangle of Cowboy, Clare, and Thimble. Was Thimble jealous of Clare? How did Clare feel about it? What was Cowboy and Thimble's relationship? They shared their visualizations of Cowboy as they "sorted out" their understanding of who this character was:

As the novel ends, Clare and Cowboy go their separate ways, Clare home to her mother, and Cowboy to a foster home. The hints of a romance are not realized. As the following conversation reveals, most of the girls seemed comfortable with this outcome; their desires had been engaged without a fully developed romance. Peggy, Suzette, Nereida and Mary discussed this situation as we concluded our discussion of the novel:

> Peggy: I was surprised that a relationship didn't develop between Clare and Cowboy. And, it said, I just read it last night, but it said that Cowboy touched her and "it was like a thousand gizzowats" or something.

Suzette: But nothing happened. It wouldn't have made the story better. It wouldn't have made the story worse or better, but they were close in the end...

Nereida: But they were together, when they were walking alone.

Mary: Yeah, but Cowboy wasn't that kind of a character: he would just go all out for you. But in the end, he and Clare seem to be just closer and better friends...

These comments speak to the ambivalence the sixth grade girls may have been feeling about their own positions, their balancing of childhood relationships and ways of being on the one hand, and new expectations of sexuality and feminine perfection on the other. Despite their interest in the touches and glances, they may have been resisting this new way of being, and relieved to know that relationships between boys and girls can simply result in becoming "closer and better friends."

Unsavory Situations

They also vicariously explored situations they would not want to live through, such as Clare's and other characters' experiences of sexual abuse. Retelling and discussing certain scenes not only provided a means of imaginatively exploring illicit sexuality, but bestowed a sense of sophistication and worldliness that belied the girls' reputation as good, compliant girls. In the fifth session they focused on events in the novel that had been hinted at:

Suzette: I just was surprised when I found out that Griffey's molested them, and Clare's been raped, and that's really why she left home...I was just really....

Peggy: They said she's been raped? By who?

Nereida: The old boyfriend...that she's left at home.

Peggy: Ohhh...

Nereida: Yeah, I thought he just molested her, but then when I read the end, and found out that she'd been raped, I felt so *bad* for her.

Peggy: *How* old was she?

Nereida: She had turned thirteen and then...

Peggy: How old was she when she was raped?

Mary: Eleven...

Suzette: I think she was twelve...

Peggy, who had missed this inference in her reading seemed to be struggling to understand this character who is her own age, yet whose experiences have been so different. Later in the discussion the girls try to understand how an adult character, Griffey, operated:

Suzette: But that's how they live...they survive.

Regina: They think drugs are bad because of what Griffey did, got them high and stuff...

Peggy: Did he rape another...man?

Suzette: Well he like got other adults and got them high, and took them to a motel, and they did stuff to them...

Luann: Griffey did it.

Nereida: Griffey did it all, he personally did.

Nereida: He was like a pimp, kind of...

Suzette: Males, females...whatever.

Peggy: What? A pimp?

Luann: A pimp.

Nereida: A pimp is someone who gets prostitutes.

Suzette: For a child.

Luann: A child pimp.

The other side of the possible romance between Clare and Cowboy was the seamy aspect of the vulnerability of these homeless adolescents. As they retold and explained for one another, the girls were able to ponder other lives and ways of

experiencing being female. In their conversations the theme of sexual abuse was discussed in ways that revealed discomfort with the topic, but also allowed them to think about it safely from their comfortable and distanced stances as readers. They enjoyed tossing around and manipulating ideas about sexuality and romance, imagining running away from home and hanging out with a gang as Clare had, while knowing that they would not do it or be involved in such activities in the present.

Agency, Desire, and Illicit Sex

The carefully realized character of Clare, stimulated engagement and imaginative recreation of scenes, and this helped the girls imagine themselves in these situations, through retelling and relishing their favorite parts. The girls pictured themselves sitting at the coffee shop with Clare, unable to pay. They recalled family visits to Reno and Las Vegas. They enjoyed the humor used by the author to describe Clare's attempt to live on her own, for example, washing, half-naked, in a public restroom .

Over the six month period that we met to talk about the four novels, I came to see that in addition to the girls' often expressed desires to be seen as knowledgeable, tough, grown up, and independent of adults, and their eagerness to know about dating, being desirable and illicit sexuality, they also revealed their ambivalence about boy-girl relationships. Their talk laid bare the enticing sense of discovering new possibilities and qualities about themselves. These combined purposes of agency and desire illustrated the fluid and often contradictory identities these early adolescent girls were constructing and informed their response to their reading, as reading itself became " a source of pleasure, play, desire" (Meek, 1983, p. 105). Their future lives as females, as adolescents in the larger world, were still mysterious, like the relationships of characters in the focal novels read over the semester. The unofficial, out of school space of the book club provided room for the girls to make these wonderings visible.

Combative Reading

The The Beggar's Ride allowed the girls to actively resist the perception that they were just "good girls," competent, polite, academically good students who could be depended upon to be conscientious and well-behaved, girls who were not boy crazy. The girls' reading could be "combative" (Finders, 1996, p. 85) in that it provided an escape from being the good girls. Although they dutifully participated in the literacies that the school promoted, they also looked for and engaged in unsanctioned literacies, such as the reading and viewing of sexually explicit materials, and even the young adult novels in the book club. Through this reading they obtained knowledge that the adults around them might not want them to have, as the discussion of rape and "child pimps" reveals. As an adult member of the group, I found myself uneasy at times as the girls discussed the suggestions and implications of sexual abuse in The Beggar's Ride and in a second text read by the group. At the same time, I recognized the importance of a safe, intimate forum for early adolescent girls to explore these issues together. No one would know what they were actually imagining as they read, unless they chose to share it in the intimacy of a setting such as book club.

Exploring the Possibilities

The data suggests that as adolescent girls struggle to negotiate their identities in the world, their environments, both in and out of school, need to be structured to provide them with experiences and opportunities that will enable them "to understand, to engage with, and to potentially transform what limits and harms them" (Basow & Rubin, 1999, p. 189). The all-girls' discussion group described here, held in after school hours, provided one possible context for engagement and understanding. The selection of novels with female protagonists allowed these readers to actively position themselves as readers who could explore their questions and emotions and to identify with the heroine. While the combination of intimate, long term single gender groups and novels with female protagonists is difficult to reproduce in schools, aspects of the book club experience are readily transferable. Choice in novel selection and study, with discussion groups organized around the

reading choice makes possible a range of literature and differently constituted groups who have selected reading according to interest and need.

Data from the sixth grade girls' after school book club adds to a body of research that strongly suggests the importance of providing literature transactions for early adolescent girls that will engage their complex reading purposes.

References

American Association of University Women. (1991). How schools shortchange girls. Washington, D.C. : AAUW Educational Foundation.

Almasi, J.F. (1995, July-August). The nature of fourth graders' sociocognitive conflicts in peer-led and teacher led discussions of literature. Reading Research Quarterly, 30 (3), 314-351.

Barnes, D. (1993). Supporting exploratory talk for learning. In K.M. Pierce. & C. Gilles (Eds.). Cycles of meaning: Exploring the potential of talk in learning communities (pp. 17-34). Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Basow, Susan & Rubin, Lisa. (1999). Gender influences on adolescent development. In Johnson, N. G., Roberts M.C. & Worell, J. (Eds.) Beyond appearance: A new look at adolescent girls. (25-52)Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Brown, L. M. (1991). A problem of vision: The development of voice and relational knowledge in girls ages seven to sixteen. Women's Studies Quarterly. 1&2, 52-71.

Brown, L.M. (1998). Raising Their Voices: The politics of girls' anger. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press.

Brown, L. M. & Gilligan, C. (1992). Meeting at the crossroads: Women's psychology and girls' development. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press.

Cherland, M. R.(1994). Private Practices. London: Taylor & Francis.

Christian-Smith, L. (1990). Becoming a woman through romance. New York: Routledge.

Christian-Smith, L.(1993). Texts of desire. London: The Falmer Press.

DeBold, E., Brown, L.M., Weseen, S. & Brookins, G. K. (1999). Cultivating hardiness zones for adolescent girls: A reconceptualization of resilience in relationships with caring adults. In Johnson, N. G., Roberts M.C. & Worell, J. (Eds.) Beyond appearance: A new look at adolescent girls. (181-204)Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Eeds, M. & Wells, D. (1989). Grand conversations: An exploration of meaning construction in literature study groups. Research in the Teaching of English. 23, (1), 4-29.

Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D. & Steinmetz, A.M. (1991). Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles. London: The Falmer Press.

Enciso, P. (1994). Cultural identity and response to literature: Running lessons from Maniac Magee. Language Arts. 71, 524-533.

Enciso, P. (1998). Good/bad girls read together: Preadolescent girls' co-authorship of feminine subject positions during a shared reading event. English Education. 30 (1), pp. 44-61.

Evans, K. S. (1996). A closer look at literature discussion groups: The influence of gender on student response and discourse. The New Advocate, 9 (3), 183-196.

Finders, M. (1997). Just girls: Hidden literacies and life in junior high. New York: Teachers College Press.

Finders, M. (1996). Queens and teen 'zines: Early adolescent females reading their way toward adulthood. Anthropology in Education. 27, (1), 71-89.

Fordham, S. (1993). 'Those loud Black girls,' (Black) women, silence, and gender passing in the academy. Anthropology in Education. 24; (1), 3-15.

Gilbert, R. & Gilbert, P. (1998). Masculinity goes to school. London; Routledge.

Gilligan, C., Lyons, N. & Hanmer, T. (Eds.).(1990). Making connections. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lukens, R. (1995) A critical handbook of children's literature. New York: Harper Collins.

Marshall, J., Smagorinsky, P. & and Smith, M.W. (1995). The language of interpretation. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE.

Meek, M. (1983). How texts teach what readers learn. In M. Lightfoot & N. Martin (Eds.) The Word for teaching is learning (pp. 83-106). London: Heinemann.

Nelson, T. (1992) The beggar's ride . New York: Orchard.

Proweller, A. (Summer,1999). Shifting identities in private education: Reconstructing race at/in the cultural center. Teachers College Record. 100 (4): 776-808.

Radway, J. (1984). Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978/1994). The reader, the text, the poem. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U. Press.

Spears-Bunton, L.A. (1992). Literacy, literature and resistance to cultural domination. In C. Kinzer & D. Lue (Eds.) Literacy research, theory and practice: Views from many perspectives. Forty-first Yearbook of the National Reading Conference . (pp. 393-401). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Twine, F. W. (1997). Brown-skinned white girls: Class, culture and the construction of white identity in suburban communities. In R. Frankenberg (Ed.) Displacing whiteness: Essays in social and cultural criticism (pp. 214-243). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Walkerdine, V. (1990). Schoolgirl fictions. London: Verso

Walkerdine, V. (1984). Some day my prince will come: Young girls and the preparation for adolescent sexuality. In McRobbie, A. & Nava, M. Gender and generation . London: Macmillan.

Ward, J. V. (1990). Racial identity formation and transformation. In C. Gilligan, N. Lyons, & T. Hanmer (Eds.). Making connections (pp. 215 - 232). Cambridge: Harvard U. Press.

Ward, J.V. (1996). Raising resisters: The role of truth telling in the psychological development of African American girls. In B.J.R. Leadbeater & N. Way (Eds.). Urban girls: Resisting stereotypes, creating identities (pp. 85-99). New York: New York U. Press.

Willinsky, John, Hunniford, R. Mark. (1993). Reading the romance younger: The mirrors and fears of a preparatory literature. In I. Christian-Smith (Ed.). Texts of desire (pp. 87-105). London: The Falmer Press.

Appendix B: Novels

	A	B	C
1	The Beggar's Ride Nelson, 1992; 245 pp.	Fleeing abuse, 12 year old Clare runs away from home hoping to find her mother's former boyfriend, in Atlantic City. She falls in with homeless teens who teach her to survive.	" Nelson balances many somber issues with wry humor and hope in the poignant novel" (Horn Book,1992, p. 83).
2	I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This Woodson, 1994; 117pp	Middle class Marie, a 12 year old African American, forms a friendship with a poor white girl. Both have lost their mothers, and as the friendship grows, Lena reveals a terrible family secret.	T)he staccato rhythm of the short chapters combine to create a haunting and beautifully poetic novel (Horn Book Guide, (1994).
3	The Friends Guy 1973/1980. 204 pp.	Two girls, Phyllisia, a recent arrival from The Islands, Edith, from Harlem, form an uneasy alliance. They become close friends, but class differences and the troubled home lives of each gradually	"A strong, honest story - often tragic, but ultimately hopeful - of complex, fully-realized characters and of the ambivalence and conflicts in human nature"(Horn Book Guide, 1974, p. 152)
4	Phoenix Rising Hesse, 1994; 182 pp.	The chilling effects of a nuclear accident provide the background for a story of friendship and love in rural New England. Nyle, 14, hesitantly befriends and come to love a young refugee	"Poignant...a tale of love and hope rising like a phoenix, from destruction and despair"(Horn Book, 1994; p. 599)

Appendix A: Participant Data

member	Luann	Mari	Nereida	Peggy	Suzette	Regina	Allison	Tara
Self identified	age 11; African American	age 11; white and Jewish	age 12; Latina	age 11; white	age 11; European American and Latina	age 10; white mother, black father	age 12; white and Jewish	age 11; African American
reason for joining	I like to hear what people say about books	I heard it was good and my mother said it sounded fun	I like to read and I don't have anybody to talk to about my reading	Because my friends came	I like to talk to people about books but you can't really do it in a big group	I wanted to know what you were reading	They talked about it and it sounded like fun	They said it was fun